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THA 2258-001: Script Analysis

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Theatre Arts 2258: Script Analysis

fall 2016 / Section 001 / 3.00 Credits

Dr. Chris Wixson

syllabus

"The creation of character is more about the adverbs than the adjectives. The (necessarily) insufficient facts about a character (provided by the author) don't matter as much as *what* a character does and *how* that character does it [since playwrights] don't supply that many adjectives. Aristotle claimed that *Self is an action* and that we discover something's nature through knowing its *telos* (its goals)." --Peter Mendelsund, *What We See When We Read*

course philosophy

The purpose of this course is twofold. One, we are going to read some plays together because part of being a theater professional is having a familiarity with the work of important playwrights. Two, according to the Eastern Illinois University course catalogue, Theatre Arts 2258 will also provide opportunities "to analyze playscripts in terms of and in preparation for performance and production, regardless of theatrical specialization." Together, we will study "basic concepts and terminology associated with dramatic literature, examine several genres and their traits, and discover means of presenting the playwrights' ideas on the stage." THA 2258 dovetails with other Theatre Arts courses in helping you to develop your *craft* as well as cultivate your understanding of theater as an art form.

THA 2258 is a reading-intensive course with a schedule that requires time and attention devoted to our scripts. The most talented and consistently interesting theatre practitioners are avid readers; careful, critical, and meaningful reading is as *vital and necessary* a skill as any in the theater. Hence, THA2258 is a required core course in the major.

THA 2258 is also writing-intensive course, designed to improve skills in critical thinking and analytical expression in order to enable you to meet the challenges of future academic tasks and enhance your proficiency in communication.

Since theater is a collaborative process, this course will involve collaborative work (including group projects and presentations) as we ingest and digest a number of scripts together while at the same time pursuing individual projects.

Learning Goals

1. To provide opportunities to analyze plays in terms of and in preparation for production and performance.
2. To understand basic concepts and terminology associated with dramatic literature
3. To broaden knowledge of dramatic literature through reading, writing, and class discussion of plays from different periods and genres.
4. To enhance skills of critical thinking and interpretive analysis.

course texts

Forwards and Backwards, David Ball

Drama, Classical to Contemporary, eds. Coldewey / Streitberger

Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers, James Thomas *Essential Plays*, Chekhov

Closer, Patrick Marber

The Little Foxes, Lillian Hellman

Ashes to Ashes, Harold Pinter

contact information

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Office Hours: and by appointment

assignments

- *Short Analysis Papers — three opportunities to demonstrate what you have learned in 3-4 page papers (Action Analysis, Given Circumstances, Character Analysis) for which revision is allowed
- *Three Group Projects/Presentations
- *Active, Engaged Class Participation --- defined as WRITING and TALKING productively.
- *Formal Analysis --a complete formal analysis covering all elements of your selected play, at least 10 pages in length

final grades

Your final grade in the course will be determined by your performance on the following assignments:

Analysis Papers (3-4 pages in length)	30%
Closer Project	10%
Woyzeck Project	10%
Ashes to Ashes Project (Final)	10%
Formal Analysis (10-12 pages in length)	30%
In-class Writings/ Active Participation	10%

**You must complete all written assignments and exams to complete the course. Failure to complete any one of the components represents incomplete work for the semester and anyone with incomplete work will not receive a passing grade for the course.

attendance

Mandatory.

I expect you to be in class awake and prepared every Tuesday and Thursday morning. In other words, arrive on time with your reading/writing assignment completed, prepared to participate in discussion. Because so much in this course relies upon in-class work, absences and habitual lateness will adversely affect your course performance. Attendance will be taken at each class session – you are allowed **two** unexcused absences before your grade is negatively affected. After that, each unexcused absence will lower your participation grade by half a letter. **Six unexcused absences will result in a “0” for participation. More than seven unexcused absences will result in a grade of no credit for the course. Habitual lateness (beyond once) will also affect your grade negatively since it is disruptive and disrespectful.** Please notify me by email if there is unexpected illness or an emergency that causes you to miss class. Do **not** get in touch asking “for the assignment” or a “rundown of what you missed.” My responsibilities as an instructor lie with the students who do come to class. Excused absences are accompanied by appropriate legal or medical documentation. Being in rehearsal, in shop, in tech, or in performance does not excuse or exempt anyone from their responsibilities to this course. **Any** unexcused absence will seriously undermine your success in this course.

class participation

Think of our meetings as potluck conversations and activities punctuated by short in-class writing and informal lectures and discussions of the material. You should come to class *prepared to talk* about the reading for that day. Participation in a college-level course means careful, full preparation of the reading, frequent contributions to discussions, risk-taking in writing and thinking. You should come to each session armed with observations, opinions, questions, and insights, ready to take an active part in the ongoing dialogue about the course materials. (This might

mean, for example, moving from merely your position during class discussion to striving to promote dialogue between yourself and other students). In addition to your required short papers, **what** else you bring to share need not be written out but should refer to specific passages in the reading as the basis for formulating a broader discussion topic or questions. Reading quizzes and in-class writings may happen relatively frequently to ensure the quality of our discussions.

Coming to class and saying you are “frustrated” with the reading and thus have nothing to contribute is intellectually lazy and irresponsible. These texts are demanding but rewarding; while there will be frustration with their complexity at times, this course understands that complexity as part of the challenge to which we aspire to rise during the semester.

For our collaborative venture to succeed, there are three preconditions that must be met: everyone must have done the reading and done it critically and carefully; everyone must be willing to contribute; and everyone must be willing to engage respectfully.

You may not *like* this class or all of the readings we discuss — which is fine. You won’t like everything you have to do in life to move forward. College is a time to develop the skills to learn what is required in a professional manner and demonstrate to your professors that you grasp the course content. Don’t come to class and sleep or check your phone or otherwise distract others and disrupt the process.

Besides excellent preparation, class participation also means responding constructively, respectfully, and energetically to what others in class share, that you work actively to stretch yourself intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. In short, you are expected to work actively to contribute to the class’s overall movement and to strive to make the course a success. **I TAKE THIS GRADE VERY SERIOUSLY.**

late papers

These are no fun for me to keep track of and only put you further behind. For each day beyond the scheduled due date, the longer critical paper will be penalized a third of a letter grade. **After a week, I will no longer accept the paper, and it becomes a “0.”** Again, if you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

cell phone and computer use

You may bring your computer to class with you, assuming that you use it in a scholarly and responsible fashion. This means that you will only have applications and windows related to the current discussion open. **You may not check** social media, surf the web, play games, or otherwise distract yourself and those around you from the class conversation with technological devices.

You are likewise expected to use cell phones in a responsible, respectful, and professional manner: **turn them off when you come in to class.** If you have an emergency for which you must be available, you must discuss it with me beforehand and keep your phone on vibrate. **Under no conditions are you allowed to** text message, take pictures or video (illegal in class), play games, or use the cell phone in any other manner during class. The nature of our academic endeavor together necessitates mutual respect and dedicated attention during the too short time we have to discuss these texts. Violating any of these policies will result in your participation grade being lowered by a full letter grade for each violation.

academic integrity

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author—that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others’ materials (words and ideas). Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Student Standards Office.

student success center

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

special needs and situations

If you have a *documented* disability and are in need of academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible in order to receive approval.

tech support

If you need assistance with D2L, call D2L Support toll free at 1-877-325-7778. Support is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Email and Chat options are also available on the "My Home" page after logging in to D2L. Other D2L resources including a D2L Orientation course for students are available on the same page. For technical questions regarding other software, hardware, network issues, EIU NetID/password, or Panthermail, contact the ITS Helpdesk at 217-581-4357 during regular business hours or submit a help ticket at <https://techsupport.eiu.edu/>. If you have a question regarding course content, contact your instructor.

Breath

by Samuel Beckett

Curtain.

1. Faint light on stage littered with miscellaneous rubbish. Hold for about five seconds.
2. Faint brief cry and immediately inspiration and slow increase of light together reaching maximum together in about ten seconds. Silence and hold about five seconds.
3. Expiration and slow decrease of light together reaching minimum together (light as in 1) in about ten seconds and immediately cry as before. Silence and hold for about five seconds.

Rubbish. No verticals, all scattered and lying.

Cry. Instant of recorded vagitus. Important that two cries be identical, switching on and off strictly synchronized light and breath.

Breath. Amplified recording.

Maximum light. Not bright. If 0 = dark and 10 = bright, light should move from about 3 to 6 and back.

THA 2258: Script Analysis

course calendar

Dr. Chris Wixson

* * Reading and writing assignments appear below on the day they are due. Please bring the appropriate texts to class.

* * Because this schedule can and probably will change, it is imperative that you bring it to each class meeting so as to make the appropriate revisions.

* * Both of our textbooks (Ball and Thomas) assume a working knowledge of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for the purposes of illustration. If you have not read the play, it is a good idea to do so as soon as possible.

August	23	Course Introduction / Beckett's "Breath"
	25	Susan Glaspell's "Trifles" (handout) / <i>Backwards and Forwards</i> Part One
September	30	Reread "Trifles" / <i>Backwards and Forwards</i> Parts Two and Three
	1	Formalist Play Analysis / Read <i>Script Analysis</i> "Introduction" (xviii-xlii) Discuss Upcoming Short Writing Assignments / Choose your Play
	6	Hellman's <i>The Little Foxes</i> / <i>Script Analysis</i> Chapter 1 (pp. 1-40)
	8	<i>Foxes</i> Analysis
	13	Reread <i>Foxes</i> / <i>Script Analysis</i> Chapter 2 (pp. 41-65) – Given Circumstances
	15	Action Analysis Due / Introduction to Büchner's <i>Woyzeck</i> (handout)
	20	<i>Foxes</i> / <i>Script Analysis</i> Chapter 3 (pp. 73-92) – Background Story
	22	<i>Woyzeck</i> / Group Meetings
	27	<i>Woyzeck</i> / Group Meetings
	29	<i>Woyzeck</i> Project Due / Group Presentations
October	4	Sophocles' <i>Oedipus the King</i> / <i>Script Analysis</i> (pp. 96-117) External and Internal Action
	6	<i>Oedipus the King</i> / <i>Script Analysis</i> (pp. 133-54) Progressions and Structure
	11	Chekhov's <i>The Seagull</i> / <i>Script Analysis</i> (pp.172-87) – Character
	13	<i>The Seagull</i> / <i>Script Analysis</i> (pp.172-87) – Character

- 18 *The Seagull / Script Analysis* (pp.234-67) -- Dialogue
- 20 *The Seagull / Script Analysis* (pp.204-26) – Idea
- 25 Marber's *Closer* (Presentations)
- 27 *Closer* (Presentations)

- November 1 Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* / Act One
- 3 *Dream* / Act Two
- 8 *Dream* / Act Three
- 10 *Dream* / Act Four
- 15 *Dream* / Act Five
- 17 Formal Analysis Assignment Due

HAPPY THANKSGIVING BREAK!!!!

- 29 Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* (handout)
Script Analysis (pp. 65-72; 92-4; 117-131; 154-70; 196-8; 226-31; 267-9291-3)
- December 1 Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*
- 6 *Ashes to Ashes*
- 8 Conclusion / Evaluation / Exam Preparation

**Final exam date: Monday, December 12th, 10:15 AM-12:15 PM

For your three short and your formal analyses, you may select from the following plays, contained in our course anthology *Drama: Classical to Contemporary* unless otherwise noted:

Chekhov, *Three Sisters* or *Uncle Vanya* (found in *Chekhov: The Essential Plays*)

Gionfriddo, *Becky Shaw* (Booth Library)

Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*

Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler*

Pinter, *The Dumb Waiter*

Rebeck, *Seminar* (Booth Library)

Shaw, *Major Barbara*

Shepard, *True West*

Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Wilson, *The Piano Lesson*